



# 101st in Iraq:

# Chasing the

Story and Photo by SGT Robert Woodward

**A**s a fiery sun rose above the horizon, dozens of Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters touched down in the parched desert of western Iraq, spewed out hundreds of infantrymen in a cloud of dust and departed as suddenly as they had arrived.

The Soldiers assembled in loose tactical formations and advanced on their objectives, two small villages and a wadi, or dry riverbed, where intelligence assets suspected terrorists were preparing for more attacks on coalition targets.

AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and OH-58 Kiowa observation helicopters circled overhead as their crews scanned the terrain below, eliminating any possibility of the enemy's escape.

The inhabitants of the two villages, about 30 miles north of the border with Saudi Arabia, found themselves trapped inside a shrinking net of "Screaming Eagles," Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division, who would soon swarm through building after building searching for members of a terrorist cell.

On this day, more than 800 Soldiers from the division's 1st Brigade Combat Team and 90 attack, scout, assault and heavy-lift helicopters struck targets more than 250 miles south of the division's

bases in northern Iraq.

According to MAJ Brian Hayes, assistant intelligence officer, 1st BCT plans, satellite imagery and other intelligence acquisitions had led officials to the conclusion that the villages were being used to train terrorists.

They believed that the organizers of the terrorist cell slept in one village, while trainees and instructors stayed at a former border-guard barracks at the southern edge of the second village, and nearby wadis were used for the actual training.

The 101st Abn. Div. was selected to destroy the terrorists' operation because of the division's ability to move combat power quickly over long distances and use the element of surprise to its advantage.

"We were looking at a huge air move in a short period of time," Hayes said. "The whole operation spun up very fast, and plans changed, based on new intelligence, almost up to the last minute."

A day before the air strikes, the air-assault task force traveled south 135

miles, from Qayyarah West Airfield in the division's northern area of operations to Al Asad Air Base, which would serve as the intermediate staging base for the mission. It was there that the final plans came together.

Eight serials of aircraft, including 19 Chinooks, 36 Black Hawks, 23 Apaches, and 12 Kiowa Warriors, flew 100 miles south of Al Asad, reaching their objectives simultaneously, at 7 a.m.

Three rifle companies from 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, and one from the regiment's 1st Bn., hit the ground and maneuvered across sand, down

SGT Robert Woodward is a journalist assigned to the 101st Airborne Division.



# Terrorists

The sun rises during the early moments of Operation McClellan, as Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division advance on Objective Fox, a barracks-like compound recently used by terrorists.

streets and through houses, looking for key suspects, documents, satellite phones and weapons.

The men were prepared for a fight, particularly at the barracks, where most of the terrorists were reported holed up.

In the end, there was no fight. Within minutes of the Soldiers' arrival, women and children, apparently squatters, appeared outside the barracks. The anticipated enemy fire never came, and the cordon-and-search phase of the operation began.

The Soldiers, by now familiar with managing civilians on the battlefield,

moved residents to a temporary holding area, to be screened by a team of intelligence and language specialists. Four individuals were detained for further questioning.

Village residents told Soldiers that a number of men abruptly left at about 1 a.m., six hours before U.S. forces arrived.

"We saw a lot more activity before we got there," Hayes said. "We think they set up an observation post, and something tipped them off and they moved out of there."

The suspected terrorists' departure was apparently so hurried that they didn't

have time to remove their weapons or hide their tracks. Soldiers from the 1st BCT found 12 surface-to-air missiles, 100 light anti-tank munitions, 63 rocket-propelled grenade rounds, three mortars, more than 500 mortar rounds, thousands of rounds of small-arms ammunition, a computer and a satellite phone.

"We definitely disrupted their operations and their planning," Hayes said. "So we also saved a lot of innocent lives today, because whatever attacks they were planning are now not going to happen."

At the end of the day, not a single U.S. Soldier or village resident was harmed in the operation.

"It was an impressive endeavor," said MG David H. Petraeus, the 101st Abn. Div. commander. "Our Soldiers did a wonderful job once again and demonstrated the division's unique ability to rapidly project combat power over substantial distances to attack a time-sensitive target." 